

Method Apparatus and System for permitting the self-service of established casino players to new casino destinations in the Gaming Industry via a Wide Area Network

DESCRIPTION

[Para 1] This invention relates to the art of facilitating the ability for a game of chance player ("casino player" or "player") to handle their own upcoming plans for accommodations and services via the World Wide Web or other Wide Area Network to a casino service provider ("casino") without human intervention or approval by applying a set of rules, conveying information translated into the native language of the patron and approving the transaction according to the casino's house rules for similar established players even if the player has never visited this particular property or companys properties before the trip being planned.

Description of Prior Art

[Para 2] There exist many forms of making reservations and many reservations systems designed to be operated by humans at a casino for the purpose of bringing an established player to the property for services. For the purposes of discussion, an established player is a customer of a casino property that has historical play with a casino stored in the casino's Customer Management System or another similar filing system which identifies the games played, hours played, amounts wagered and other information common in the industry which would be used to identify the player, qualify the player for future trips and other discounted services. These established players are preferred in some instances to players who are not established, or "rated."

[Para 3] Historically, systems used by casinos to market to established players are self-contained and designed by programmers to be operated by casino personnel. These systems have no ability to be used by the established casino patron themselves for the purposes of planning services. Some systems

have been extended to permit limited self-service on the gaming floor by an established player for the purpose of obtaining free or discounted services like meals while on-property; however, these systems require that the established player already be a member of that particular casino's frequent player program (i.e. they must be rated at that casino). These systems work quite well for established patrons returning for additional services, future trips, or free meals.

[Para 4] While these systems take into account a returning player that has been previously been rated in their casino system, none seem to handle the established player with past play at a competitor's casino property, which is new to this particular casino property and/or brand. Further, despite much automation in the decision-making ability of the existing player development service systems, which are designed to approve, discount and free services for returning players, the highest of services to established players of competitive properties must still be approved manually with human intervention. Often this approval process is handled by a special customer service agent called a "host" or by a member of the senior marketing staff. It is routine in the host's industry to make phone calls, obtain faxes, and use human networking techniques to validate the past play of an established player at a different property. Existing systems stop short of any automated or mechanical means to validate the past play of an established player who has not yet visited a casino's property or sister properties.

[Para 5] Therefore a continuing need exists for a system which will take into account an established player's past play at another casino property in real-time via a centralized system, communicate the established level of play, apply a set of house rules, reserve and book the service request with the destination casino property's system, create an audit log and trail, and communicate with the player in their native language without human or host intervention.

[Para 6] An object of the present invention comprises a method and apparatus for providing a potential casino patron (player) with a means to self-service the arrangements directly into the computer systems, hotel management systems, and other reservations apparatus required to process an upcoming set of services at the casino property for the new or returning player. Said system services these players on a wide area network, such as the Internet, and directly controls the process and all

related facts surrounding the complete interaction of the process between the clients, the casino and the casinos where the player has been established from prior visits. In other words, potential casino patrons may use this system to plan new trips, with discounted and free amenities despite the fact that they have no prior experience at the casino in question. Furthermore, since the system is designed with multiple languages, the casino patron may self-service in their native language while the system validates their play, forms an audit trail and interacts with staff members at casino destinations independent of the patron's native language. The present implementation supports seven languages including French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, and Portugese; however, the embodiment of this invention is by no means limited by these seven languages.

[Para 7] A further object of the present invention is to provide all interested parties of the transaction with the current status of the established player's past play lookup, the status of the reservation or request for amenities or services from the prospective casinos, and a list or combination of services, discounts or free amenities that the player qualifies for on the planned trip based upon an application of the house rules for the chosen casino. These house rules are programatically entered by the operating casino staff members and are capable of determining eligibility around the clock to self-servicing casino patrons electronically.

[Para 8] A further object of the present invention is to provide a method and apparatus, which enables a plurality of gaming clients and casino service providers to manage a plurality of patrons via a global computer information network, such as the Internet.

[Para 9] A further object of the present invention is to provide a method and apparatus, which enables both new and pre-qualified players to access the current or historical status of the interactions via a global computer information network.

[Para 10] A further object of the present invention is to permit the casino patron to flag their request for human review or automated approval based upon a series of factors which may be configured by the casino establishment and changed from time to time based upon marketing priorities and other management policies. This "work queue" appears to the casino staff members

as a list of items to approve or reject based upon subjective qualities of the content.

[Para 11] The above objects are substantially achieved by providing a computer and software program, recorded on a computer-readable medium, for controlling the computer of a potential client to maintain and generate a listing of players, maintain important rules of the trade, rules specific to the destinations and business logic of the expected exchange. The software program interacts with the database of information and applies the business rules to create lists of clients, alerts, emails, and other data that can be accessed via the Internet. Specifically, the software program is adapted to be run by a casino patron's computer to control the computer to generate a computer readable file (request file) that includes information pertaining to established play, ratings, trip dates, money wagered, desired trips, approval status, confirmation numbers, type of computer system, location of access, reservations, contacts, companies, and transactions that can be accessed from a remote site via the Internet. For example, these files can be posted as a Web site on the World Wide Web.

[Para 12] The current invention can utilize the Internet. The Internet comprises a vast number of computers and computer networks that are interconnected through communication links. The interconnected computers exchange information using various services, such as electronic mail, Gopher, and the World Wide Web ("WWW"). The WWW service allows a server computer system (i.e., Web server or Web site) to send graphical Web pages of information to a remote client computer system. The remote client computer system can then display the Web pages. Each resource (e.g., computer or Web page) of the WWW is uniquely identifiable by a Uniform Resource Locator. To view a specific Web page, a client computer system specifies the URL for that Web page in a request (e.g., a Hypertext Transfer Protocol ("HTTP") request). The request is forwarded to the Web server that supports that Web page. When that Web server receives the request, it sends that Web page to the client computer system. When the client computer system receives that Web page, it typically displays the Web page using a browser. A browser is a special-purpose application program that affects the requesting of Web pages and the displaying of Web pages.

[Para 13] The system is more efficient, effective, accurate and functional than the current art.

Brief Description of Drawings

[Para 14] Without restricting the full scope of this invention, the preferred form of this invention is illustrated in the following drawings:

[Para 15] FIG 1 shows an overview of how a casino player accesses the system through the Internet;

[Para 16] FIG 2 shows a sample of casino players' computers connecting to the system; and

[Para 17] FIG 3 shows the system sending a message to a client.

Detailed Description of Drawings

[Para 18] The following description is demonstrative in nature and is not intended to limit the scope of the invention or its application of uses.

[Para 19] There are a number of significant design features and improvements incorporated within the invention.

[Para 20] As shown in Figure 2, the present invention comprises a computer 25 with the software 35 program recorded on a computer-readable medium 30, for controlling the computer of a potential client to maintain and generate a listing of trips, maintain important rules of the trade, rules specific to the established play at other properties and business logic of the expected transaction. The software program interacts with the database of information and applies the business rules to create lists of approved amenities, their rates, details, approval level, trip dates, arrival information, assigned host and service personnel, alerts, emails, and other data that can be accessed via the Internet. Specifically, the software program is adapted to be run by a potential client's computer to control the computer to generate a computer readable file (requested services file) that includes information pertaining to trips, contacts, age, gender, etc that can be accessed from a remote

site via the Internet 500. For example, these files can be posted as a Web site 100 on the World Wide Web 500.

[Para 21] The present invention comprises a method and apparatus for providing a potential client 120, such as a casino player, self-service functionality with time and destination components that dramatically extend the art of established rated casino player self-servicing for players 120 serviced within a business that are planning to travel to a casino establishment. Additionally, the potential client 120 operates in their own spoken and written dialect or language. More specifically, the present invention relates to a method and apparatus which enables these potential clients to record all aspects of their past-play and the systems automatically validates the past play at the casinos where the player was previously established as a player 120 during the lookup process by maintaining a database 310 of historical, phase and state information pertaining to the transaction used in the business to introduce players 120 to the new property for an upcoming trip. The current invention accomplishes this via a global computer information network, such as the Internet 500, to record data relevant to the transaction while enforcing a series of business rules which must be followed during the transaction as defined by the casino's business operation. These rules must be followed to satisfy certain legal, regulatory or common-sense guidelines during the booking process and are inherent in the system.

[Para 22] The present invention further enables casino personnel to use the Internet 500 to manage and approve the transactions, perform reporting, create graphical representations of the process, value the transactions, the destinations and relative business being formed at each of the destinations or offices, verify staff and internal personnel performance, create graphs and other reports both online and offline on the relative performance of customer service personnel performing the functions on the part of the self-service system.

[Para 23] The computer application that includes the user interface for this invention will henceforth be referred to as the "System 1." The system is network-based and works on an Internet, Intranet and/or Wireless network basis as well as a stand-alone and fax-based system.

[Para 24] FIG. 1 illustrates a functional diagram of a computer network for World Wide Web 500 access to the System 1

from a plurality of Users 10 who access the system Web Site 100 or the Users 10 can connect directly to the System 1. Accessing the System Web Site 100 can be accomplished directly through a communication means such as a direct connection, an intranet, a Local Internet Service Provider, often referred to as ISPs, or through an on-line service provider like CompuServe, Prodigy, or American Online, etc. or Wireless devices using services like ATT or Verizon.

[Para 25] The Users 10 contact the System Web Site 100 using an informational processing system (Client) capable of running an HTML compliant Web browser such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Lynx or Mosaic. A typical system that is used is a personal computer with an operating system such as Windows 95, 98 or ME, NT, 2000 or Linux running a Web browser. The exact hardware configuration of computer used by the Users 10, the brand of operating system or the brand of Web browser configuration is unimportant to understand this present invention. Those skilled in the art can conclude that any HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) compatible Web browser is within the true spirit of this invention and the scope of the claims.

[Para 26] In one preferred embodiment of the invention, the Users 10 and/or Casinos 20 connect to the System Web Site 100. In the preferred embodiment the system has numerous web pages. The information in the web pages are in HTML format via the Hypertext Transport Protocol (http) and on Server System database 310. The User System 110 includes software to allow viewing of web pages in multiple languages including double-byte implementations, commonly referred to as a Web Browser, such as Communicator available from Netscape Communications Corp. or Internet Explorer available from Microsoft Corp. The user system is capable of accessing web pages located on Server System database 310.

[Para 27] Output can include a graphical user interface, hardcopy, facsimile, e-mail, messaging or other communication with any humanly or machine discernable data and/or artifacts. In some embodiments, output can include transmitting the risk variable related data to a designated recipient, any humanly or machine discernable data and/or artifacts.

[Para 28] The system 1 is set to run on a computing device. A computing device on which the present invention can run would be comprised of a CPU, Hard Disk Drive, Keyboard, Monitor, CPU Main Memory and a portion of main memory where the system

resides and executes. A printer can also be included. Any general-purpose computer with an appropriate amount of storage space is suitable for this purpose. Computer Devices like this are well known in the art and are not pertinent to the invention. The computing device can serve as a server.

[Para 29] The invention comprises a method and apparatus for providing a game of chance player self-service system for players 120 serviced within a business that are being provided to a casino establishment without the need for a host to approve amenities which would normally only be approved for an established returning customer by accessing historical play information from competing casino locations via a wide area network.

[Para 30] The system 1 enables casino staff to record data relevant to the transaction of delivery of casino clients 120 to destinations, casinos, venues, bars, nightclubs, and to each other including, but not limited to: the stage of the introduction process, preferred language, desired dates of travel, desired casino play, past play, past casino trips, desired travel, qualifying information, personal data, pictures, methods of transportation, personnel greeting and meeting information, alerts, probability of travel coming to fruition, charges related to the trip, credit and front-money requirements for the trip, arrival and departure dates, nightclub and other entertainment information, personal travel companions, spouse information, group leaders and other attributes associated with the other individuals on the trip.

[Para 31] These items are stored on the system's database 310. The system 1 enforces business rules and logic required by the site's business against these data to ensure that a business process is followed that maximizes profit, play and travel.

[Para 32] Casino Clients or Hosts as Users 10 can search this collection of data from the database using a series of qualifying criteria or context criteria, including dates of travel, age of member, gender of member, spouse or travel partner, desired games to be played, historical games played, complimentary status, approved or rejected complimentary, approved or rejected service amenities (meals, limos, etc), previous trips, "do not call" lists, common interests, play history, body features, pictures, and facial recognition attributes for security processing against criminal data as well

as other personal information which may be of interest to a venue or person traveling.

[Para 33] The system 1 further enables a client 120 to be searched from a multiplicity of such clients, based upon their attributes, play or travel history. The method and apparatus further enables a client 120 to be searched based upon their desired destination. The method and apparatus further enables a player 120 to be searched based on their preferred games or style of playing games of chance. Standard search methodology that is commonly known in the art is used.

[Para 34] The system 1 enables the site administrator, client 120 or venue service personnel, as a User 10, to verify the client's profile information in real-time, batch or via the Internet with remote computer systems operated by the casino service provider for the purposes of scoring the client's profile against actual data collected during a previous visit of the player 120 to the casino service provider. The system 1 as a web-based system permits any licensed user 10 to book clients 120 via the web directly into a casino's or hotel systems.

[Para 35] The system 1 will enable the administrator, client or venue service personnel, as a User 10, to use this score against a series of criteria (rules) that match the casino service providers desired customers for a specific future travel data specified by the representative, player or casino service personnel. And to transmit this data back through the system for established players traveling to new casinos other than this one.

[Para 36] Thus, the venue service personnel may take hypothetical pairings of potential casino patrons and extrapolate the potential value of these patrons and pre-emptively make such an offer to entice them to return. This allows the venue, client or casino service personnel to concentrate on those players 120 that match specific criteria and maximize venue use or profit.

[Para 37] The system 1 is connected to other databases and computer systems, such as hotel reservation systems 130, allowing it the capable of monitoring gaming service provider hotel inventories, gaming space, and desired gamers and notifying the player 120 when a casino service provider has openings for which the player is qualified and/or interested in is made available by the gaming service provider. The system 1 can notify the player 120 and/or the service provider 20 through

E-mail, mail, phone, and fax or any other means of communications 140 as shown in Figure 3.

[Para 38] The system 1 allows a plurality of casino service providers, representatives, and players 120 as users 10 to interact at a single location accessible via a global computer information network. The system 1 has a communications function that further enables a player and the venue representative to communicate directly with a gaming service provider facility, such as a casino, via the Internet if the client is interested in completing the plans for the client's next experience at the gaming service provider's facility (booking).

[Para 39] The system 1 allows a plurality of casino service providers to monitor the transactions and automatically notifies the venue representative and client when a rule is violated during the interaction process.

[Para 40] Advantages the previously described version of the present invention has many advantages. It provides a system for providing a game of chance player (casino player) self-service, language-independent system for players, it provides a method and apparatus to monitor the transactions and automatically notifies the casino personnel when a stay or amenity requested by the player is approved, rejected or suspended, it provides a method and apparatus which enables a plurality of casino providers to manage a plurality of players via a global computer information network, and it provides a method and apparatus which enables both new and pre-qualified players to access the current or historical status of the interactions via a global computer information network. Although the present invention has been described in considerable detail with reference to certain preferred versions thereof, other versions are possible. Therefore, the point and scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the description of the preferred versions contained herein.

[Para 41] As to a further discussion of the manner of usage and operation of the present invention, the same should be apparent from the above description. Accordingly, no further discussion relating to the manner of usage and operation will be provided.

[Para 42] With respect to the above description, it is to be realized that the optimum dimensional relationships for the parts of the invention, to include variations in size, materials, shape, form, function and manner of operation,

assembly and use, are deemed readily apparent and obvious to one skilled in the art, and all equivalent relationships to those illustrated in the drawings and described in the specification are intended to be encompassed by the present invention.

[Para 43] Therefore, the foregoing is considered as illustrative only of the principles of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation shown and described, and accordingly, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to, falling within the scope of the invention.